



# GHANA COVID-19 BACK TO SCHOOL MONITORING REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2020

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## ACRONYMS

COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease
JHS	Junior High School
SHS	Senior High School
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WHO	World Health Organisation
GHS	Ghana Health Service
GoG	Government of Ghana
GES	Ghana Education Service
MoE	Ministry of Education
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
WASSCE	West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations
IE&C	Information, Education and Communication
KNUST	Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology

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- Hope Alive 360
- Care Love Charity Foundation
- Ghana National Association of Teachers
- Conference of Heads of Private Schools
- Ghana National Association of Private Schools

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## INTRODUCTION

The Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) and its attendant social distancing and lockdown have negatively affected the education sector of Ghana by cutting short the 2019/2020 academic year in the middle of March instead of July. While continuing students have lost over 14 weeks of instruction, Ghana's effort, synonymous with the continental norm has been to salvage the future of finalists-Junior High School (JHS) 3 and Senior High School (SHS) 3 students.

Consequently, the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and World Health Organization (WHO) issued protocols to guide countries in planning the reopening of schools. These were followed by guidelines from the Ghana Health Service (GHS) and the Ghana Education Service (GES). These protocols and guidelines from the embodiment of psycho-social, water, sanitation and hygiene, health and safety, pedagogic and behavioural pre-requisites to make schools safer for students, teachers and non-teaching staff.

The President of the Republic of Ghana on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May, 2020 issued a directive to the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the GES to reopen schools for finalists to prepare and write their examinations in August and September, and some continuing students in SHS (Gold Track) to catch up with their counterparts in track green who had the better of the semester before COVID-19. In all, Ghana's pre-tertiary education system opened up for over one million students, about 12% of the total pre-tertiary population of 9 million.

In as much as these arrangements resonated with Africa Education Watch's proposal to the GES as part of measures to salvage the academic year from the impact of COVID-19 and ensure finalists are able to write their exams and graduate ahead of the envisioned commencement of the next academic year in September 2020, there was the need for an external, independent monitoring of the compliance of GES to the UNESCO, GES and Ghana Health Service (GHS) Protocols by Civil Society Organisations within the educational ecosystem; not just to ensure compliance with the prescribed COVID-19 protocols, but also to document the best practices and implementation challenges with the view of engaging GES towards strengthening their approach in the anticipated opening of all classes for the next academic year.

With funding from ActionAid Ghana, Africa Education Watch and its regional partners purposively sampled 100 SHS and 100 JHS from which the monitoring of the implementation of the COVID-19 school reopening protocols took place. The team monitored compliance to health and safety, pedagogic, social distancing, psycho-social, water, sanitation and hygiene protocols in the month of July 2020. This report is a documentation of the findings and recommendations of the COVID-19 Back to School Monitoring Report.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The report commends the Government of Ghana (GoG) for taking the bold initiative to re-open school, even in the midst of rising infections, and the spread of COVID-19 in some schools. Indeed, Ghana was among the first four counties to re-open schools in the sub-region, in spite of having the highest infection rate. It also acknowledges the government's absorption of examination fees to ensure no financial barrier existed to prevent the re-enrolment of students. This notwithstanding, the lack of opportunities for re-entry of pregnant girls, delays in disbursement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), the lack of timely training of teachers and school heads before re-opening, and absence of sickbays and health personnel in some schools constituted major drawbacks of the reopening plan. The ensuing paragraphs present the summary of key findings and policy recommendations to improve the school re-opening agenda.

Were teachers trained in health & safety protocols, GES COVID-19 guidelines & classroom management? Teachers in 52% of schools were not given any form of training before schools re-opened, even though 48% received some orientation on health and safety prior to re-opening. The schools without prior re-opening training included Nassah Junior High School (Upper West Region), Our Ladies of Lourdes Girl's SHS, Bawku SHS, Bolgatanga Technical Institute (Upper East Region), Darul Hardis JHS and Kpambegu Khalidiya Islamic JHS (Northern Region), Nyankumasi Ahenkro SHS, University Practice SHS (Central Region), Accra High School and Accra Girls SHS. It is worth noting however, that, many other teachers were later trained after schools reopened.

What are the issues surrounding PPE

supplies? Schools received veronica buckets, sanitizers and face masks for students and staff in various quantities. The highest numbers of veronica buckets were received by Prempeh College (130) and Okuapeman SHS (100), with the lowest numbers to SHS being Peki SHTS (5), Sombo SHS (4) and Baidoo Bonsoe Senior High Technical School (3) in the Volta, Upper West and Western Regions respectfully.

In JHS, majority (78%) received between one and two veronica buckets, sanitizers and face masks for student and staff in various quantities. the highest numbers of veronica bucket were received by Prempeh College (130) and Okuampeman SHS (100), with the lowest numbers to SHS being Peki SHTS (5), Sombo SHS (4) and Baidoo Bonsoe Senior High Technical School (3) in the Volta, Upper West and Western Regions respectively.

There were delays in the distribution of the PPEs due to its centralized nature. PPEs were procured and distributed directly under the Office of the Senior Minister. The centralized nature of the procurement and distribution process caused extreme delays in their supply to schools, with 49% of schools receiving their face masks after schools re-opened. Only 13% of schools received their PPEs prior to re-opening, accordance to plan. The Ministry of Health has already indicated government's intention to decentralize PPE procurement and distribution.

Were face masks received at the right time and in right quantities as indicated by GES? There were delays and numerical discrepancies in receipt of face masks as most schools received the full complement of three, with others receiving one or two. About 49% of schools received their face masks after re-opening with only 38% of teachers receiving all three (3) pieces. Majority (47%) of schools received two (2) with 15% receiving only one. This goes to confirm the complaints of teacher unions regarding poor supply of PPEs.

Did GES provide medical screening for kitchen staff? The only screening kitchen staff were taken through was the routine temperature checks on all resident within the school community. Contrary to the GES' guidelines, none of the 100 SHS sampled had their kitchen staff tested for COVID-19 or certified medically before or during re-opening.

Were school heads trained in COVID-19 school management? The 5-paged GES guidelines for school re-opening did not provide guidelines on COVID-19 risk management communication and case management. School heads were only directed to report any suspected case to the District COVID-19 Task force by calling a designated telephone number for medical support. The lack of any training for school heads in COVID-19 Case Management in School, including risk management communication, created a helpless situation in many schools that experienced outbreaks or suspected cases.

How efficient were the school COVID-19 teams? All schools had COVID-19 teams whose mandate was to coordinate the implementation of the guidelines at the school level. The teams, headed by school headmasters, played key roles in educating, enforcing compliance to recommended guidelines, while liaising with district level health teams. It is worth mentioning that, the tedious nature of the work, especially in schools that recorded cases, made it difficult for some teachers to blend effective teaching with the Committee's duties.

Were schools disinfected? All schools, both public and private were disinfected first against bedbugs and other insect pests, and later against COVID-19. The exercise, which was coordinated by Regional and District Education Directors, was completed prior to re-opening, in line with GES guidelines.

What was the science behind re-opening and re-closing? The absence of published

guidelines on the scientific indicators that warranted re-opening, together with the magnitude of spread that could necessitate school re-closure were key gaps in the Ghanaian school re-opening response. These only came into light when infections began to cross the 50 mark in schools; but when quizzed, health authorities were evasive, and later equivocal on whether or not there were any benchmarks for anticipated school closure. After persistent pressure by Civil Society and the media, a later announcement of 15% infection rate in a particular school as re-closure benchmark was an obvious afterthought.

What was the state of Health facilities on campuses? During our monitoring, a student died of non-COVID causes at KNUST SHS, partly because there was no healthcare professional on campus, nor an equipped sick bay to provide first aid. Although most (82%) SHS had sick bays, some 18%, mostly rural ones, did not have any. This included schools like Zorkor SHS (Upper East), Brekum SHS (Bono), KNUST SHS (Ashanti) and Takpo SHS in the Upper West Region.

Did GES provide healthcare professionals on campuses? Contrary to the GES guidelines assuring the assignment of a healthcare professional to each educational institution, there were no healthcare professionals in 36% of schools. The tremendous importance of the real time presence of healthcare professionals to government's re-opening plan, as pronounced by the President, suggests about one third of SHSs were not ready to re-open. Notwithstanding, all SHS had designated isolation rooms.

Where were the professional counsellors? Only 12% of schools had professional counsellors. Schools with professional counsellors were mainly mission schools that were supported by their faith based sponsors to engage these professional counsellors. The majority (88%) of schools sampled had teachers deputizing as counsellors, albeit untrained ones.

## Which fees did government absorb due to COVID-19?

Government decided to absorb the West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) examination fees of 313,837 students in the public sector, amounting to over GHC 75.4 million (Approximately US\$ 11 million). This is highly commendable, in cognisance of potential economic barriers to examination registration, coming from a period of lockdown which crippled the economies of many vulnerable households.

How many schools recorded girls-dropout after the prolonged school closure and why? Consistent with available literature on post-pandemic girls' re-enrolment, specifically from Liberia and Sierra Leone after Ebola, 22% of schools had issues of girls not returning, barely one month into re-opening for SHS and three weeks for JHS. Two reasons were adduced for the

How did schools observe physical distancing? Physical distancing was generally observed in class, dormitories and dining halls. Class seating arrangements were adequately spaced in line with the GES/UNESCO protocols, with 82% of sampled SHS recording maximum class sizes of twenty-five (25). Nonetheless, 13% of SHS had maximum class sizes of thirty (30). There were also about 5% of SHS that had maximum class sizes above (30) in the Upper East, Bono East and Greater Accra Region. It is praiseworthy that at the JHS level, the class limit of thirty (30) was fully observed in all schools.

Were dining hall seating COVID-19 compliant? In dining halls, a significant (60%) number of schools operated 6 to 8 students per table policy, with the remaining 40% hosting 9 to 14 students on a table. Whereas the 6 to 8 students per table situated fairly within the

absence of girls from school; pregnancy (75%) and marriage (25%), with SHS in the Upper East Region having the most cases.

The current design of SHS admissions will make it impracticable for these pregnant girls to re-enter school under the GES re-entry policy for pregnant girls.

This is because; admissions are centralized through the Computerized School Placement System, and also only permitted at SHS 1, where a unique Student Code which is valid for a three year period, coterminous with the three year duration of SHS education in Ghana is assigned to students. This means, whenever girls drop out of school due to pregnancy in their final year, the unique Student Code would have expired after childbirth, leaving the only option for re-entry to private SHS.

recommended physical distancing of one-metre, same could not be said of the 9 to 14 per table, which only allowed about a half metre distancing, making such dining halls a high risk area for COVID-19 infection.

Is there adequate security in our schools? SHS were largely unfenced, making it possible for students to sneak out and vice versa. In fact, 90% of schools did not have fenced campuses, whereas 85% lacked adequate security officials to man all the points of entry into the schools. Schools like St Augustine's College (Cape Coast) and St John's SHS (Sekondi) with a land area of about 50 or more acres had only three security men at post at any particular time. This posed great difficulties in enforcing the COVID-19 guidelines.



## Recommendations

- A. GES should amend the SHS admissions system to allow school heads to re-admit pregnant girls after delivery.
- B. Government must decentralize the procurement and distribution of PPEs to avoid the delays in supply.
- C. GHS must set and publish COVID-19 incidence thresholds for school re-opening and re-closure even before schools are re-opened.
- D. GHS must establish and implement a regular randomized sampling testing protocol of the school population to inform policy on the incidence in schools.
- E. GHS must provide nurses in every secondary school.
- F. GES must provide sick bays in every secondary school.
- G. GES must ensure every school receives PPEs and sanitation logistics before re-opening.
- H. GES must increase the number of veronica buckets per school to enable each classroom to have its own bucket.
- I. GES must develop a COVID-19 School Management Manual to guide school heads, and train them on it before re-opening schools.
- J. GES must ensure Health and Safety training for school staff precedes school re-opening.
- K. GHS must produce and display Information, Education and Communication (IE&C) materials on COVID-19 protocols and compliance across campuses to help in Behaviour Change of students.
- L. Civil Society Organizations must collaborate with the media to broadcast sex/moral education content targeting adolescent girls at home.
- M. Teachers who serve on the School COVID-19 teams should be excluded from teaching, to strengthen their focus.

## FINDINGS

### **What are the highlights of the UNESCO & GES COVID-19 School Re-opening protocols and guidelines, and what did they require of GES?**

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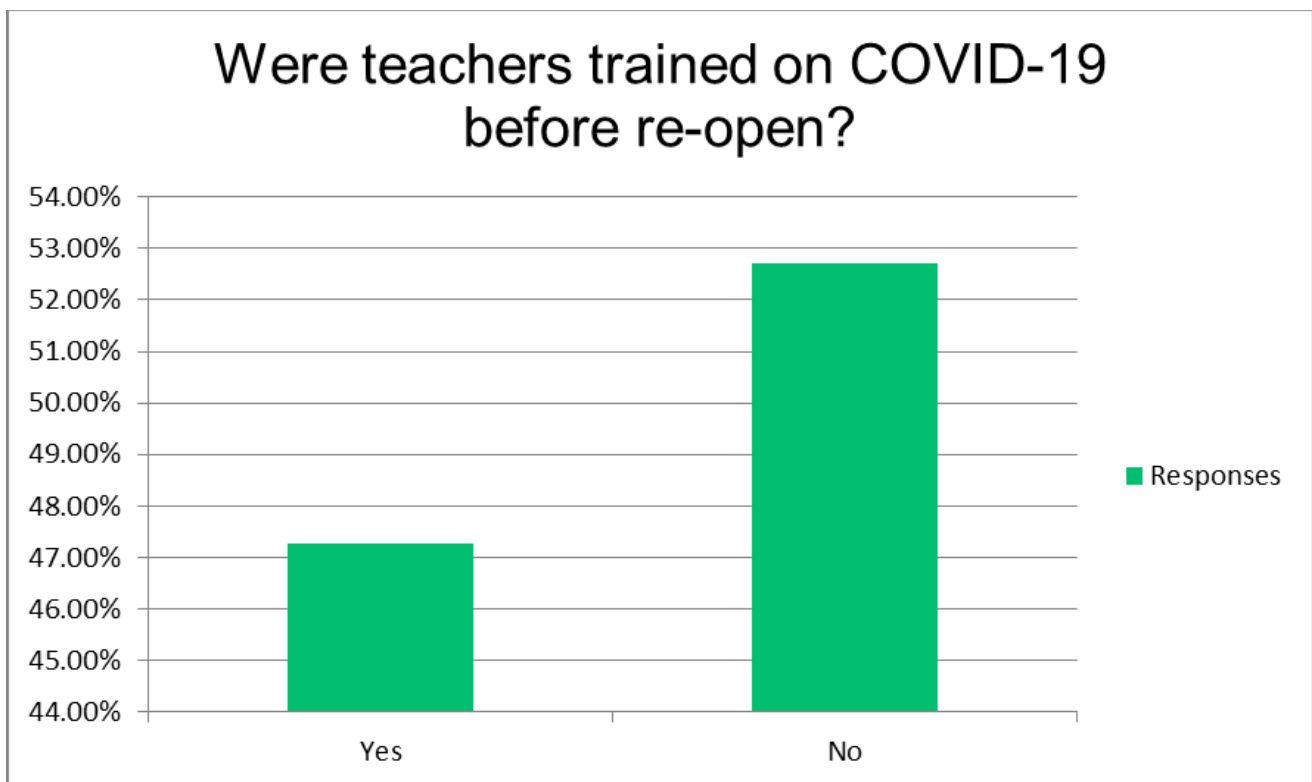
The guidelines and protocols mandated the GES to among others:

1. Train and fully equip teaching and administrative staff in school on implementing physical distancing, school hygiene practices, including orienting cleaning staff on disinfection.
2. Equip schools with Personal Protection Equipment to ensure schools are COVID-19 complaint before re-opening schools.
3. Screen and medically certify all kitchen staff before re-opening to ensure there is no possible transmission of COVID-19 from the kitchen.
4. Provide school leaders with clear guidance to establish procedures if students or staff become unwell. Guidance should include monitoring students and staff health, maintaining regular contact with local health authorities, and updating emergency plans and contact lists for their teachers to receive health and safety orientation ahead of re-opening.
5. Develop a decision model for re-closing, and re-opening schools as needed due to resurgence of community transmission.
6. Provide onsite medical facilities before re-opening schools.
7. Provide psycho-social and counselling services to students.
8. Waive school fees and other costs wherever possible and eliminate other barriers to entry to maximize re-enrolment rates.
9. Operate class sizes of twenty-five (25) for SHS and thirty (30) for JHS, and allow for at least one-metre all round distancing of school seats in classrooms to reduce the possibility of infections.
10. Take specific measures to support girls' return to school through increased community engagement.

## How prepared were teachers prior to school reopening?

UNESCO recommend that countries should train and fully equip teaching and administrative staff in school on implementing physical distancing, school hygiene practices, including orienting cleaning staff on disinfection, and equipping same with personal protection equipment to ensure schools are COVID-19 complaint before re-opening. How prepared were school staff prior to reopen?

**Table 1: Training of teachers before re-opening**



Per our findings, 52% of schools indicated that teachers were not given any form of training before school reopened, but 48% received some orientation on health and safety before school reopened. Majority of the schools without prior training were located in the Upper East, Upper West and Northern Regions, examples of which include Nassah Junior high school (Upper West Region), Our ladies of Lourdes Girl's SHS, Bawku SHS, Bolgatanga Technical Institute (Upper East Region), Darul Hardis JHS and Kpambegu Khalidiya Islamic JHS (Northern Region), Nyankumasi Ahenkro SHS, University Practice SHS (Central Region), Accra High School and Accra Girls SHS (Greater Accra Region).

The preparedness of school heads transcends health and safety training to include among others, training in school management protocols to properly equip them in the event of an outbreak of COVID-19. Situation heads were not trained in the management of a COVID situation, even though guidelines were issued out to them.

## Were there clear guidelines and procedures for managing cases?

UNESCO recommended that education authorities should 'Provide school leaders with clear guidance to establish procedures if students or staff become unwell. Guidance should include monitoring student and staff health, maintaining regular contact with local health authorities, and updating emergency plans and contact lists nor their teachers to received health and safety orientation ahead of reopening'.

The 5-paged GES guidelines for school re-opening provided basic protocols, and an operational framework for re-opening schools. It did not provide guidelines on COVID-19 risk management communication and case management. School reopening heads were only directed to report any suspected case to the District COVID-19 Task force by calling a designated telephone number for medical support. The lack of training for all school heads in COVID-19 Case Management in School, including case communication, prior to re-opening, created a helpless situation in many schools that experienced outbreaks or suspected cases.

In the Accra Girls SHS, it took 6 days for a media house to break the news of a suspected case (which later increased to about 55 confirmed cases), in spite of the headmistress being on the same whatsapp platform with Parents. The penumbra on the case communication protocols created a communication gap which occasioned severe agitations and rancour between parents who lost confidence in the schools integrity management of the pandemic, as it appeared there was a policy of silence operating. This explained why on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July, 2020, parents invaded the premises of Accra Girls' SHS to retrieve their wards.



### How efficient were School Based COVID-19 Teams?

All schools were entrusted with the responsibility of forming School Based COVID-19 teams to coordinate the school

response, and act as an interface between the school and the District COVID-19 Committee and health authorities in case of a suspected case. COVID-19 teams were constituted in all SHS with teachers splitting their time between teaching and working for the COVID-19 teams, an issue which affected their teaching. In schools that had suspected cases, the work of the COVID-19 teams were so intensive that, it made it difficult for members to prepare adequately for class and/or provide quality time on task in class, according to respondents who were members of the COVID-19 teams. Team members suggested that they be excluded from teaching to enable full time commitment to the work of the COVID-19 team, whose task included overseeing the observance of the COVID-19 protocols within

the school environment. It included ensuring compliance at dining halls, classrooms, dormitories, reporting suspected cases to the health authorities, following approved evacuation guidelines and ensuring schools received and distributed their PPEs to students, staff among others.

### **What science and data informed planning reopening, and possible re-closing?**

UNESCO Recommended countries to develop a decision model for re-closing, and reopening schools as needed due to resurgence of community transmission.

The absence of published guidelines on the scientific indicators that warranted reopening, together with the magnitude of spread that could necessitate school closure were key gaps in the Ghanaian school reopening response. These only came into light when infections began to cross the 50 mark in schools; but when quizzed, health authorities were evasive and later equivocal on whether or not there were any benchmarks for anticipated school closure. After persistent pressure by Civil Society and the media, a later announcement of 15% infection rate in a particular school was an obvious afterthought.

### **Health facilities and personnel in schools**

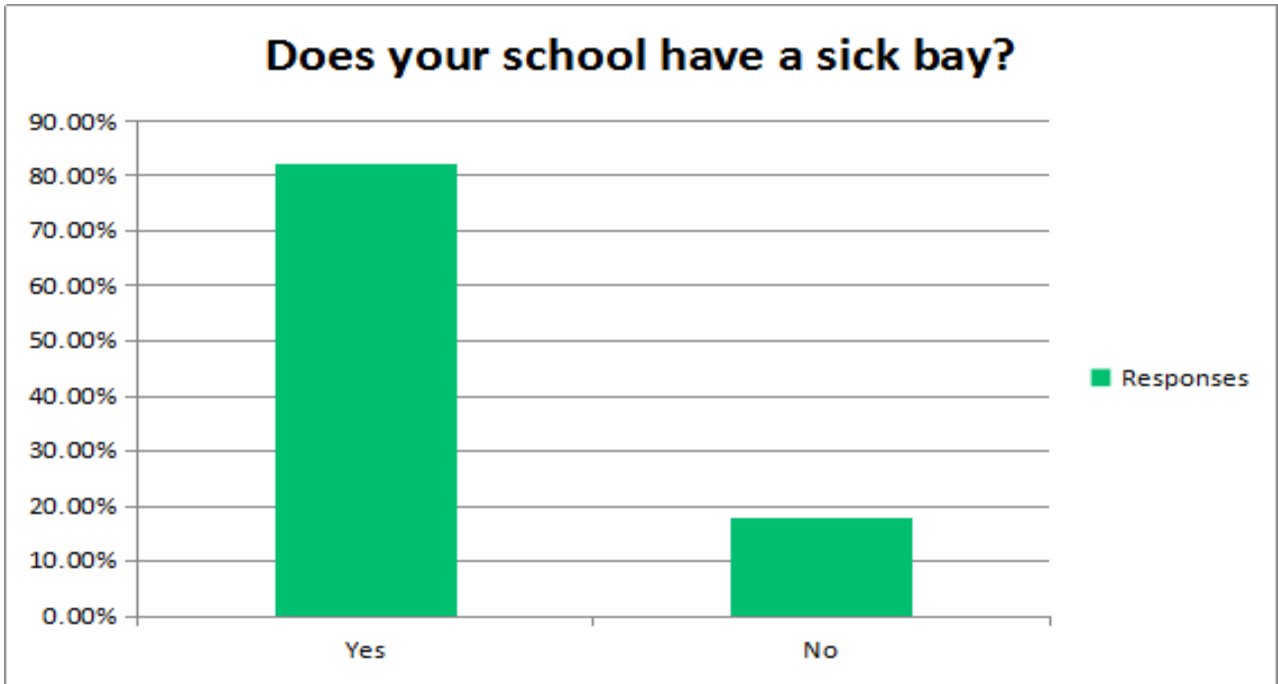
The provision of onsite medical service was a critical part of UNESCO's school reopening protocols, especially for boarding schools. The KNUST SHS's reported case of the death of a student presented an unfortunate example of how the absence of sick bays affect the health and wellbeing of students in especially boarding schools, as a student was left in pains for over an hour without any first aid, on suspicion of having COVID-19, a perception which was later disproved by the health authorities after an autopsy. The presence of a sick bay with a nurse could have saved that student from death.

### **Did boarding schools have sick bays?**

Ahead of school reopening, the GES indicated that schools would receive a deployment of health personnel to handle any COVID-19 emergency. Health personnel normally operate from sick bays on campuses, where primary health care is provided. International standards in secondary education, especially boarding schools, require all schools to have sick bays manned by nurses, in order for schools to provide primary healthcare to students and the school community. While majority of schools had sick bays, some, especially rural ones did not have them. Our tracking indicated 18% of SHS did not have sick bays, and this included schools like Zorkor SHS (Upper East), Brekum SHS (Bono), and Takpo SHS in the Upper West Region. The GES must work assiduously with its partners to ensure every SHS has a sick bay fully equipped to provide primary healthcare to residents of the school community.



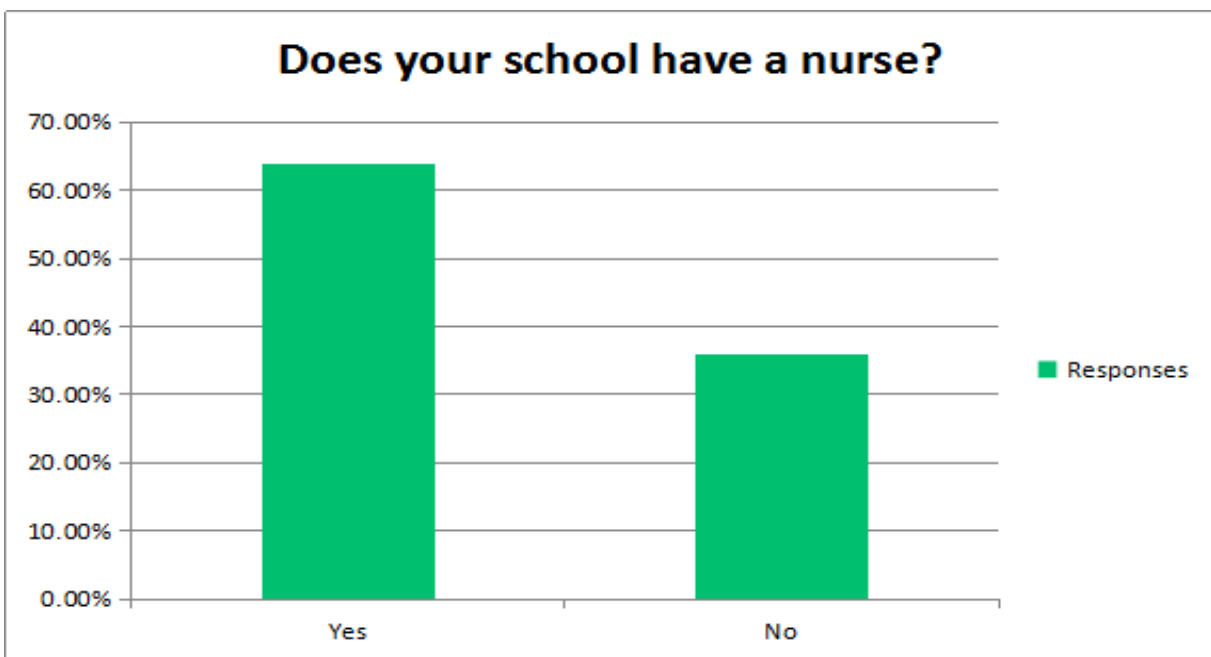
Table 2: Availability of sick bays in SHS



**Were nurses available on school campuses?**

Related to the availability of sickbays is the presence of trained nurses on campus. As mentioned earlier, during our monitoring, a student died at KNUST SHS because there was no nurse on campus, neither was there an equipped sick bay to provide primary health care. The absence of nurses in about 36% of schools tracked, contrary to the GES' guidelines on school reopening which made provision for nurses, suggests about one third of SHS were not ready to re-open, taking into cognizance the importance UNESCO, GHS and GES attached to the presence of nurses in school as a pre-requisite for reopening.

Table 3: Availability of Nurses on Campuses



As usual, majority of the schools without nurses were rural, grade 'B' and 'C' schools, compared to urban and peri-urban grade 'A' schools most of which had nurses.

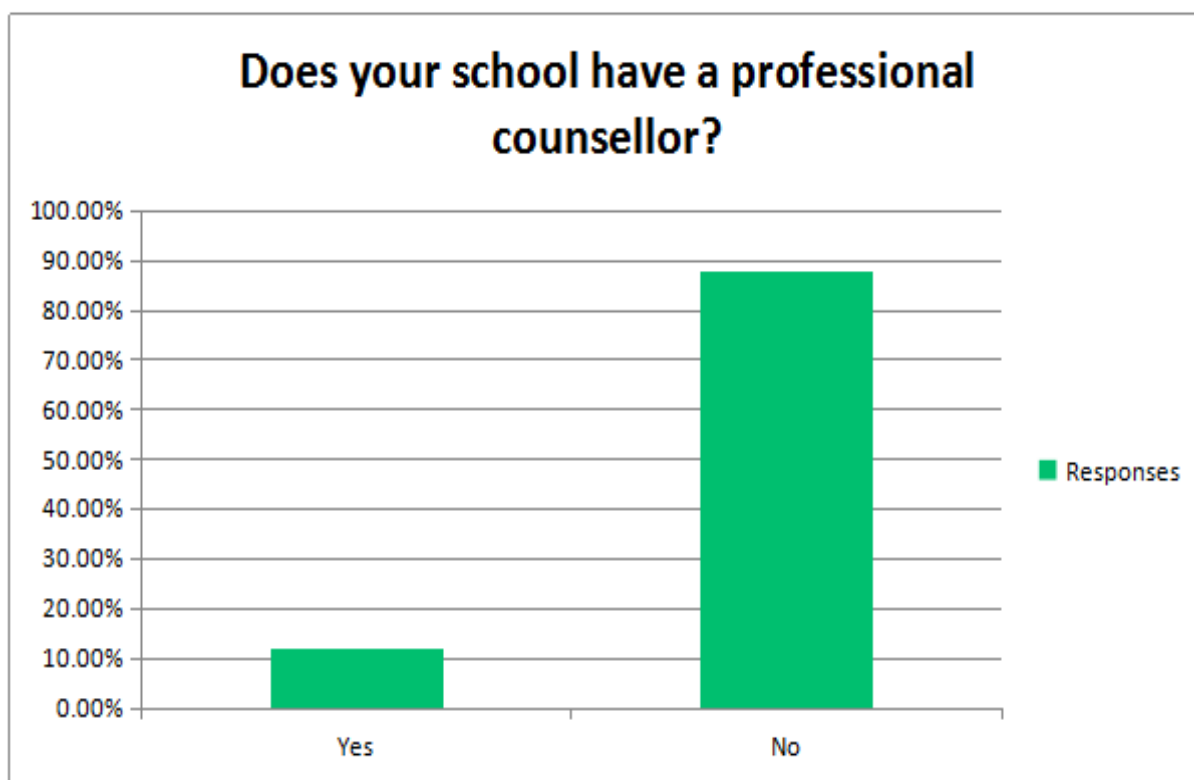
### Health Data Management

In countries like Namibia, health authorities were present at schools daily to collect vital statistics of students which are recorded and transmitted to the health authorities for relevant analysis. These included temperature data and other notable symptoms exhibited at school which are relevant for scientific analysis. This was missing in the Ghanaian case, as security men and teachers were the handlers of the schools' thermometer. At the Accra High SHS, there was a security man who administered the laser thermometer to ensure only students, staff and visitors with compliant temperature levels were permitted entry. He never recorded any data.

### Guidance and Counselling

With the uncertainties of the coronavirus outbreak, it is completely understandable to be concerned and to experience stress. This is why UNESCO recommended member countries to provide psycho-social support, including counselling services to students as schools re-opened. The provision of counselling services is predicated on the availability of professional counsellors, especially in secondary schools. Our tracking in SHS revealed only 12% of schools had professional counsellors. Schools with professional counsellors were mainly mission schools that were supported by their faith based sponsors to engage these professional counsellors. The majority (88%) of schools sampled had teachers deputizing as counsellors, albeit untrained ones. It is imperative for the GES to engage professional counsellors to provide counselling services for all SHS in the event of the reopening of the entire school.

**Table 4: Availability of Professional Counsellors in School**



UNESCO recommended governments to waive school fees and other costs (school uniforms, etc.) wherever possible and eliminate other barriers to entry to maximize re-enrolment rates. In response, the Government of Ghana took a decision to absorb all examination fees for finalists ahead of school reopening. The registration fees for the West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations (WASSCE) ranged between GHC 250 to GHC 500 attendant lockdown, depending on the programme of study. In all, government absorbed the examination fees of 313,837 students in the public sector, amounting to over GHC 75.4 million (Approximately US\$ 11 million).

## How secured were Secondary Schools?

Unlike many African countries, Ghana's secondary education system is primarily boarding. Over 70% of SHSs are boarding schools, which make managing schooling in COVID-19 both challenging and advantageous; advantageous because, once students are screened and confined within the walls of the boarding school environment; adequate security could ensure no outsider intrudes, thereby reducing the risk of an imported infection. This becomes challenging when there is no security in school to enforce confinement. To prevent the risk of importing the virus into schools, the reopening plan of the GES required all boarding schools to accommodate their day students and prevent any visitor from entering the campus, while confining students from stepping out of campus. Our monitoring discovered over 90% of schools visited did not have fenced school campuses; while 85% did not have adequate security officials to man the points of entry into the school. A school like St Augustine's College (Cape Coast) and St John's SHS (Sekondi) with a land area of more than 50 acres had only three security men at post.

Located in Sekondi, in the Western Region of Ghana, Adiembra SHS is a boarding school with capacity to host about 2,000 students but without adequate security-only two security men man the school's boarders. In July, 120 students managed to break COVID-19 protocols by sneaking into town, at a time when they were supposed to be confined within the school campus for a period of six weeks ahead of final exams. It was therefore not surprising that the school later recorded a COVID-19 case.



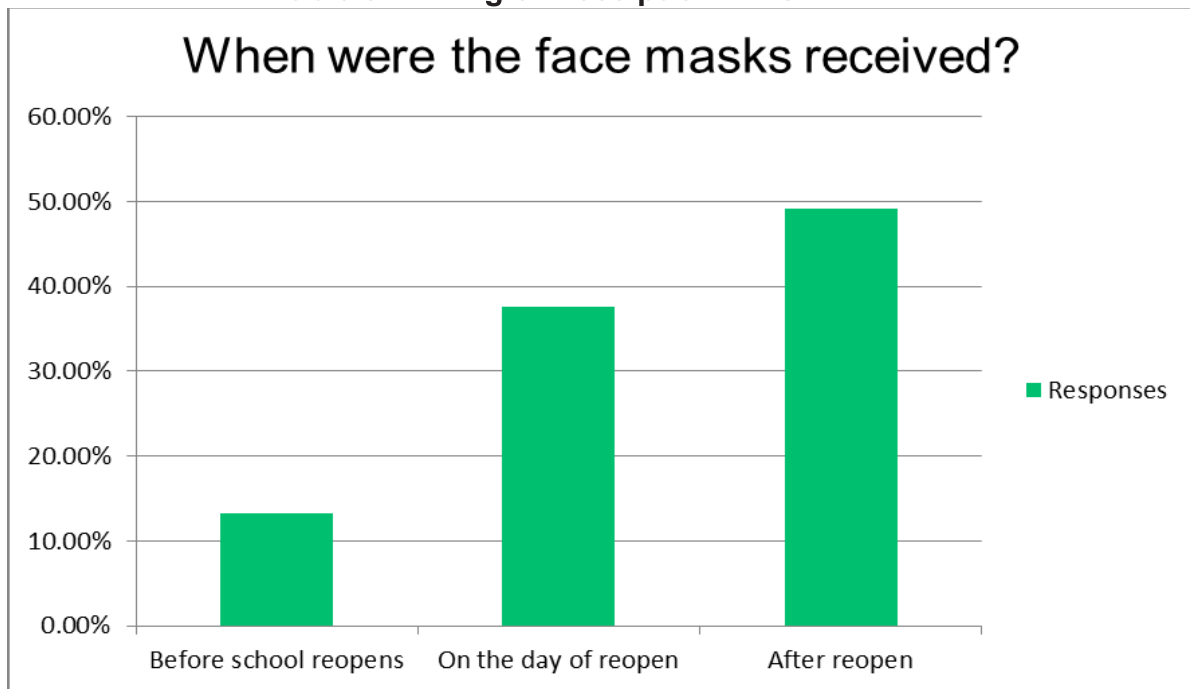
## Supply of PPEs

Personal Protective Equipment is equipment worn to minimize exposure to hazards that cause serious workplace injuries and illnesses. Since COVID-19, PPEs like face masks, veronica buckets (buckets with in-built pipes and hand sanitizers) have been used everywhere to protect one from getting infected or infecting others with the COVID-19 virus. Both UNESCO and GES committed to supplying PPEs to staff, students and educational institutions. Two weeks to reopening of schools, government announced the distribution of three face masks to all students and workers in school. Our monitoring revealed inefficiencies in the distribution of the PPEs. The process was



centralized under the Office of the Senior Minister and distributed through the Regional Education Directorates. The centralized nature of the procurement and distribution of PPEs led to extreme delays in their receipts by schools. Our study found that about 49% of schools received their face mask after school reopened with 38% receiving theirs on reopening day. Only 13% of schools received their PPEs prior to reopening, in accordance to plan.

**Table 5: Timing of Receipt of PPEs**



This means, majority of the schools did not receive their masks before or on the day of reopening, a situation which exposed those who did not have the recommended face masks to danger of an infection. Schools like Zebilla Secondary Technical in the Upper East Region received their consignment of PPEs, comprising face masks, veronica buckets and sanitizers, three days after re-opening.

In addition to the centralized procurement and distribution was the lack of funds by some JHS to transport PPEs from the District Education Offices (DEO). Most JHS in rural districts complained that, the delayed disbursement of the 2nd tranche of the Capitation Grant made it difficult for them to hire a vehicle to transport PPEs to their schools, as there was no money to manage schools. This was corroborated with the Conference of Heads for Basic Schools. In order to avoid the repeat of the status quo, teachers preferred the DEOs to directly supply PPEs to each school before reopening.

Teacher at Accra High SHS received their face masks and sanitizers after one month of school reopening. These delays were confirmed in a statement issued by the pre-tertiary teacher unions on 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2020, over three weeks into re-open, where they threatened to withdraw their services due to reasons including the lack of PPEs for their members.

**Were kitchen staff screened medically and certified ahead or during reopening?**

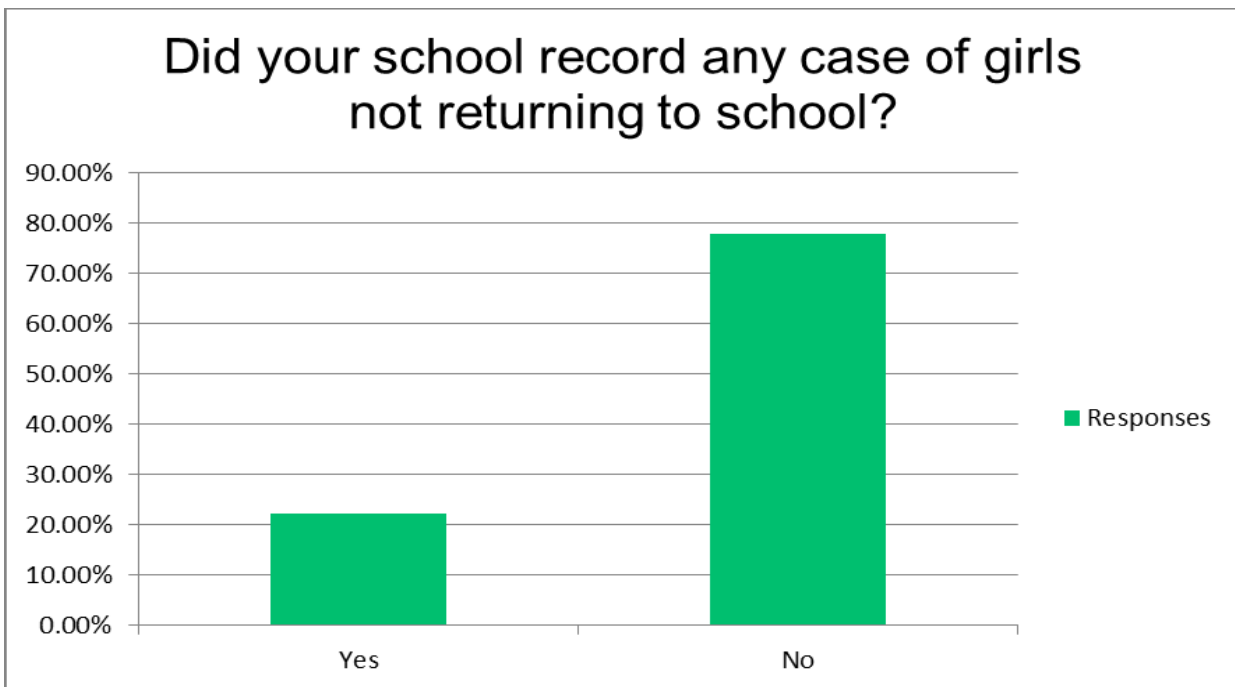
Screening and certification of boarding school cooks: In its 5-paged guidelines for reopening schools, GES mentions that all kitchen staff shall be screened and certified medically before reopen to ensure there is no possible transmission of COVID-19 from the kitchen.

Our tracking revealed this did not happen. The only screening kitchen staff was taken through was the routine temperature checks on all within the school community, including students and teachers. None of the 100 schools sampled had their kitchen staff were tested for COVID-19 or certified medically before or during reopen.

**Did all Girls return to school after four months of closure?**

Lessons from post Ebola Sierra Leone and Liberia in 2015 suggested that about 20% of students did not return to school after the 9 month closure of schools due to the lock down. Majority were girls who ended up in the world of work, pregnancies and marriage. Our monitoring sought to ascertain from schools whether all girls had returned, and if not, what the reasons, if any were.

Table 6: Re-enrolment of Girls after school closure

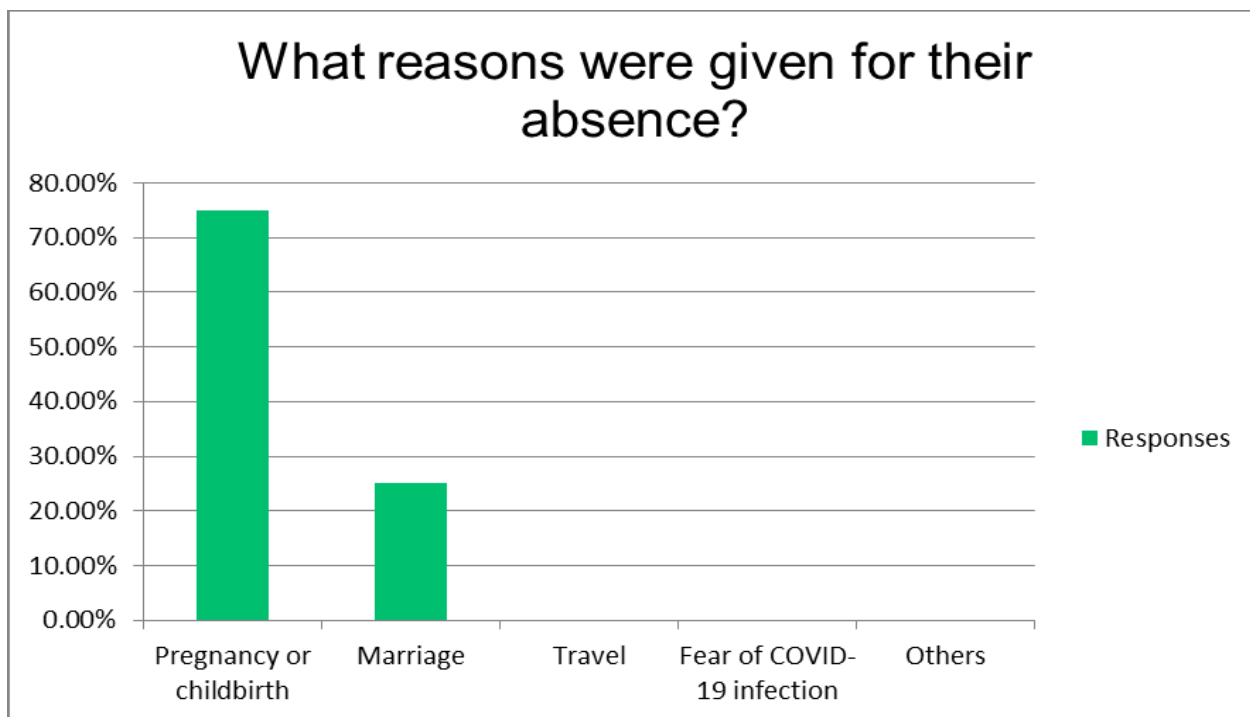


For majority (78%) of the schools sampled. All girls returned to school, both at JHS and SHS. However, 22% of schools had issues of girls not returning, barely one month into reopening for SHS and three weeks for JHS. Concerned about what could have occasioned their absence, we sought to ascertain the reasons schools had received from families, friends or acquaintances. Two reasons were adduced for the absence of girls from school; pregnancy (75%) and

marriage (25%), as depicted in table 7.

This brings into question the need to step up efforts at the community and policy levels to increase engagement with girls at home on sex education, for as long as schools remain closed.

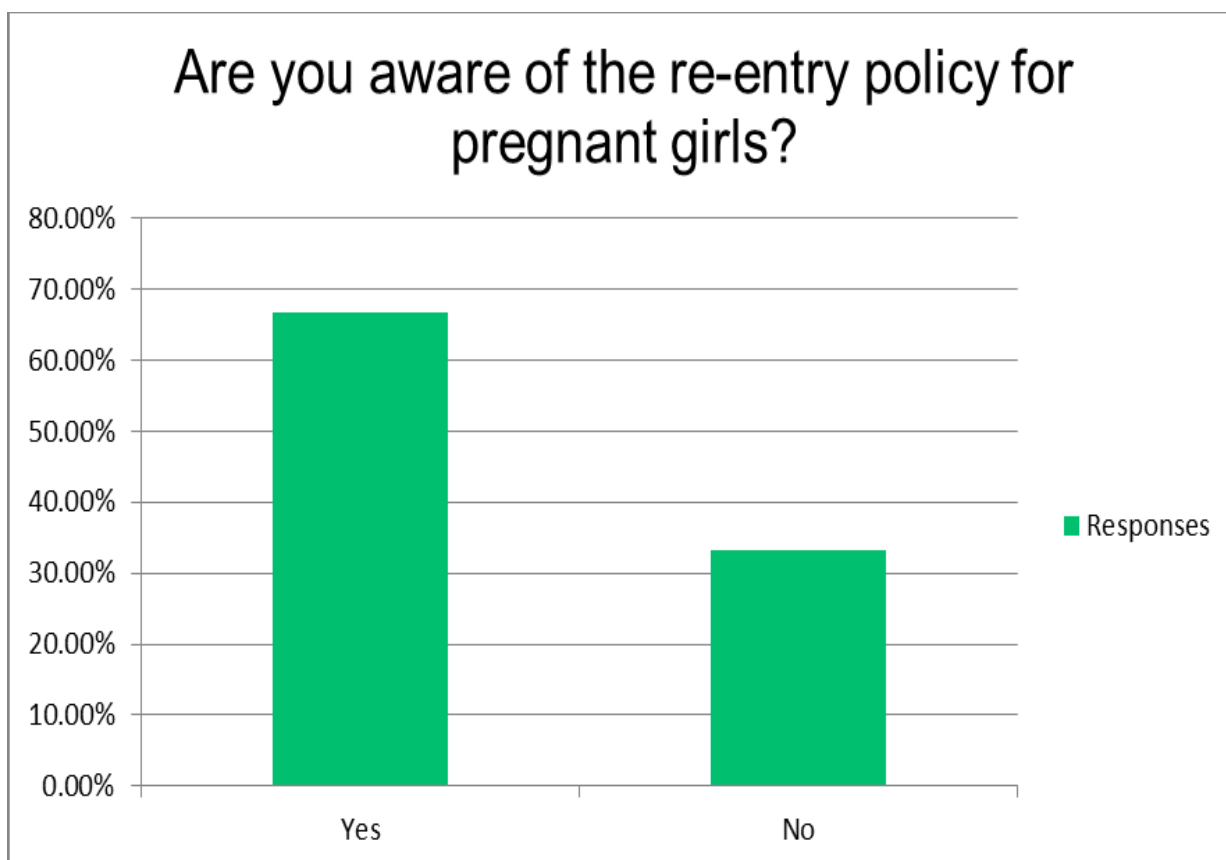
**Table 7: Reasons for Girls' absence from school**



The media is one useful tool which can be harnessed by Civil Society, National Commission on Civic Education, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection etc. to propagate content that makes adolescent girls at home (during these long periods of school closure) more conscious about sex and their education. Related is the opportunity for re-entry for victims of pregnancy.

The GES' re-entry policy for pregnant girls in pre-tertiary institutions has existed for about a decade, yet seen very little implementation. The policy creates a route for girls re-entry into school after pregnancy, by prescribing several psycho-social, economic and academic support which are often not available due to resource constraints at the school level. Stakeholder awareness of policies is a necessary step towards acceptance, ownership and implementation. Interestingly, the 66% of respondents that admitted knowledge of the policy weren't quite sure of its practicability within the free SHS policy.

Table 8: Teacher awareness of re-entry policy for pregnant girls



Teachers in management positions indicated that it was impracticable to implement the girls' re-entry policy in SHS because admissions were not only centralized but only permitted at SHS 1 through a computerized placement system which allocates a peculiar Student Code which is valid for a three year period, coterminous with the three year duration of SHS education in Ghana. This means, when girls drop out for one year due to pregnancy, they cannot continue from their previous class since by then, the cohort they are identified with (Per the Student Code) would have moved on to the next year.

Policy Illustration: Amina was admitted in August 2017 to pursue her three (3) year secondary education at 'God is Great' SHS. Upon admission, she was assigned a Student Code that entitles her to free education, including feeding, accommodation, books, and uniforms among others. The code is valid for three (3) years and non-renewable. She became pregnant during the COVID-19 lockdown period and could not return to school when school re-opened for finalists in June, 2020. According to the GES re-entry policy for pregnant girls, Amina should be given the opportunity to return to school after delivery and continue her education. But this is not possible under the Free SHS Policy of the Ghana since her Student Code will expire by September 2020, by which time Amina would likely be pregnant.



To fully operationalize the re-entry policy for pregnant girls, it is crucial for school heads to be given the mandate to grant special re-admission and an extension of the Student Code under the FSHS programme. This would ensure the decentralization of re-entry opportunities for girls at the SHS where majority of teenage pregnancy cases occur among girls aged between 16 and 18.

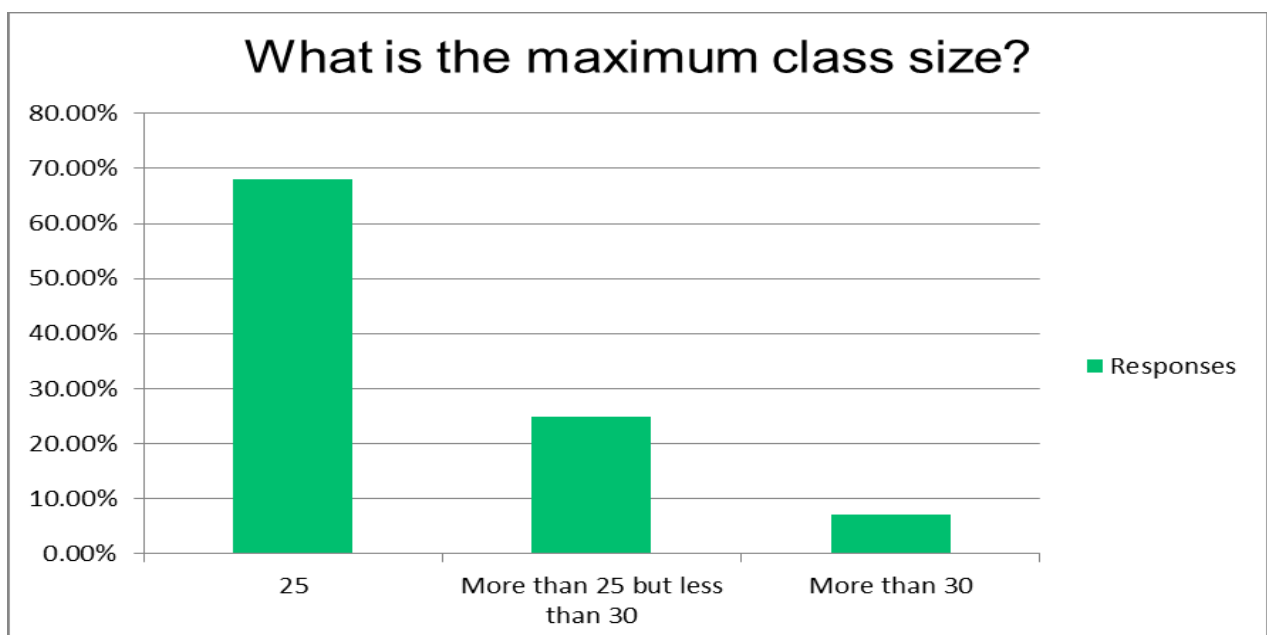
### Was physical distancing observed in schools?

UNESCO and GES recommended a maximum class sizes of thirty (30), to allow for at least one-metre all round distancing of school seats in classrooms to reduce the possibility of infections. The physical distancing protocol extended beyond the classroom to break periods, dormitories and dining halls among others. It also extended to include a ban on large assemblies on campus.

Generally, lunch times, break times, and the movement of pupils around the school were staggered, to reduce large groups of children gathering. Class seating arrangements were adequately spaced in line with the GES/UNESCO protocols, with 82% of sampled SHS recording maximum class sizes of twenty-five (25). Nonetheless, 13% of SHS (including Ashaiman SHS and Accra Girls' SHS) flouted the protocol by running class sizes of thirty (30), above the threshold of twenty-five (25). Issue is also made of situations in 5% of SHS which had class sizes above 30. They included Bolgatanga SHS, Guakro Effah SHS, (Bono East), and Ideal College (Greater Accra Region). It is commendable that at the JHS level, the class limit of thirty (30) was fully observed in all schools.



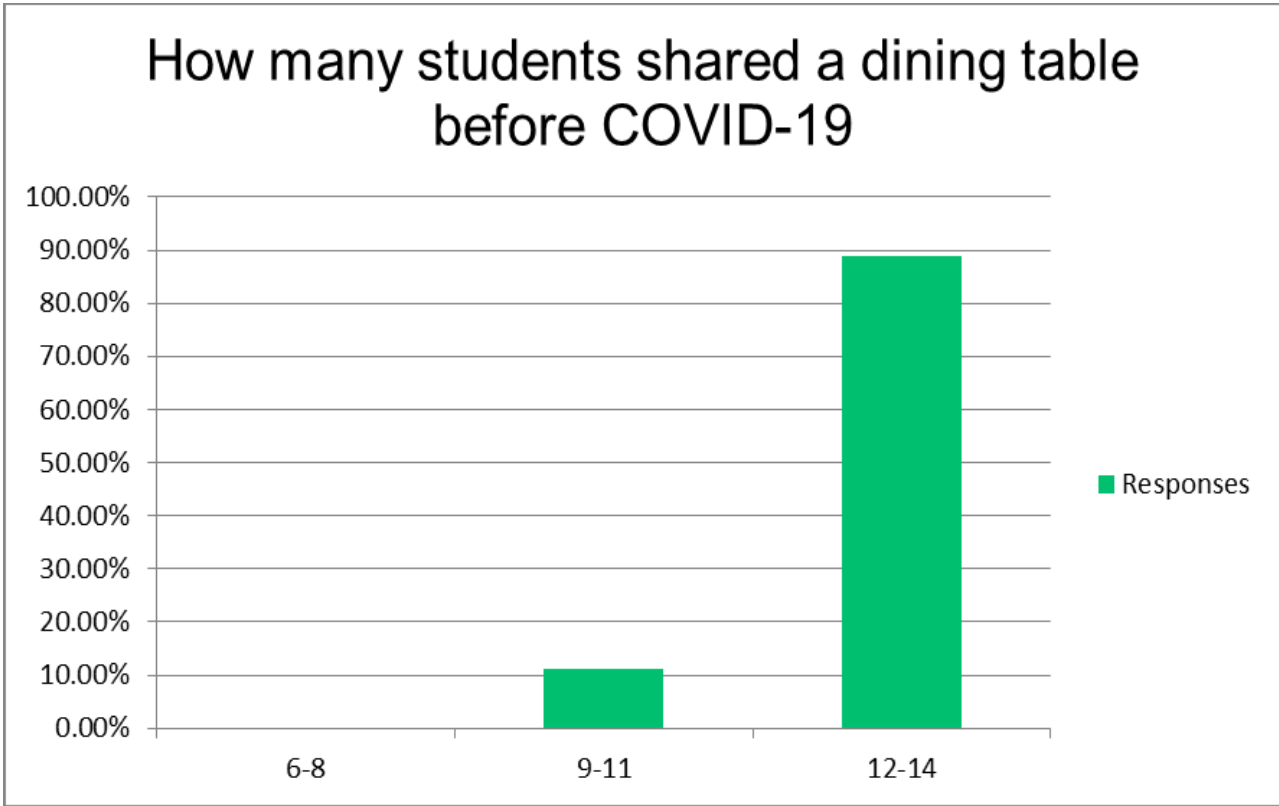
Table 9: Class sizes in schools



**How did infrastructure deficits affect strict compliance to physical distancing?**

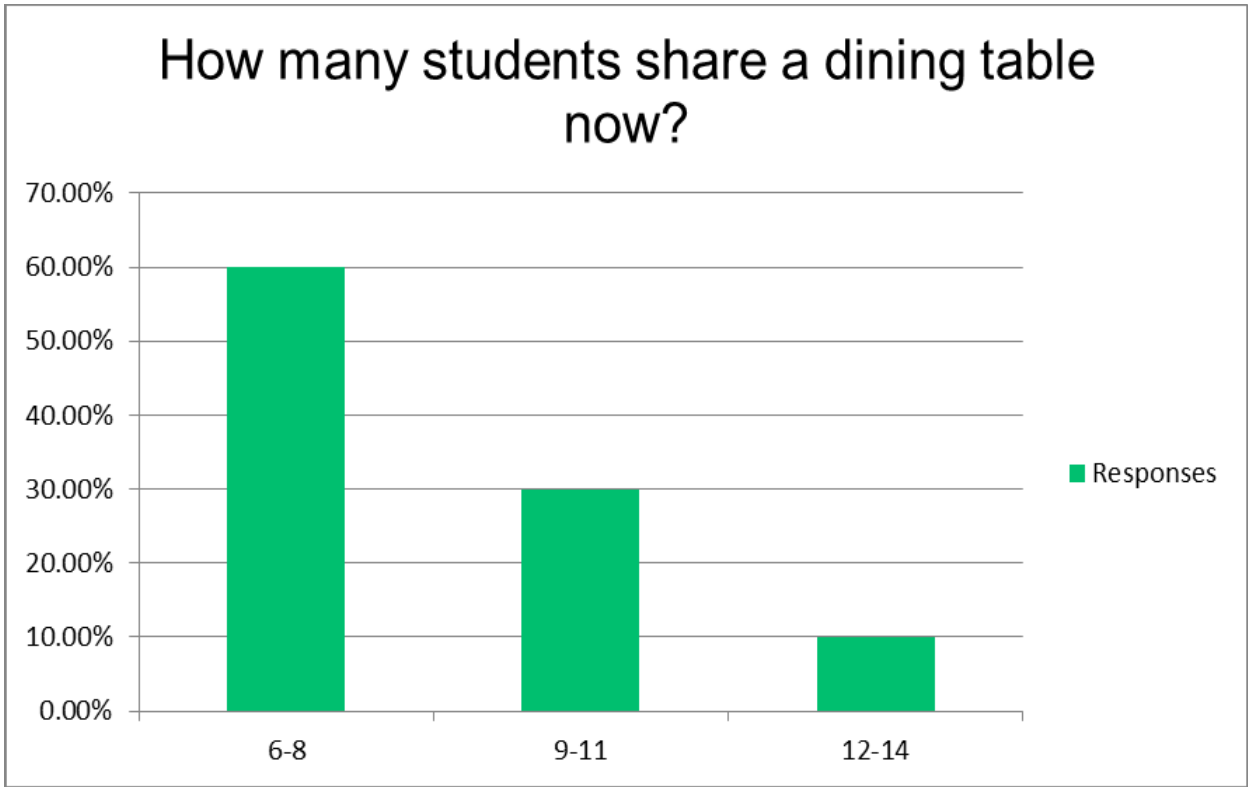
Prior to school reopening, the dining hall of a fish processing company was detected as one of the central spreading points for COVID-19, after one staff had infected over 400 within days, forcing the company to shut down. As a results, prior to reopening, stakeholders expressed much concern about the organizing of dining hall activities. A standard dining table in SHS measures 4 metres in length and 1 metre in width, with capacity to seat between 12-14 students, prior to COVID-19, as depicted in Table 10. Going by this norm, as observed in schools like Opoku Ware SHS, Edinaman SHS and Sekondi College, we conclude that a maximum of 6 students on a table was a reasonable norm that allowed one-metre spacing.

Table 10: Regular Dining Hall Seating Protocols before COVID-19.



Our monitoring however discovered that, majority (60%) of schools operated a 6-8 students per table policy, with another 30% hosting 9-11 students on a table. Whereas the 6-8 students per table situated fairly within 'reasonable social distancing' of close to one-metre, the 9-14 per table could not allow for adequate physical distancing, thereby posing high risks of infection. A similar situation is reported to have accounted for the spread of infections in Accra Girls' SHS, which later saw students use classrooms as a supplementary dinning place to allow for adequate spacing.

Table 11: COVID-19 Dining Hall Seating Protocols.



We further observed that, schools were able to achieve smaller ratios of students per dining table because dinning sessions were phased into batches. Some school authorities indicated us that, in the midst of the examination, it was impossible to run dinning sessions in batches since there was averagely ninety minutes break in-between the examination periods in the afternoon.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The GES should amend the SHS admissions system to allow school heads to re-admit pregnant girls after delivery.
2. The Girls Education Unit of GES must embark on community back to school campaigns to identify and support girls needing support to re-enter school.
3. Government must decentralize the procurement and distribution of PPEs to avoid the delays in supply.
4. Government must set and publish COVID-19 incidence thresholds for school re-opening and re-closure even before schools are re-opened.
5. The GHS must establish and implement a regular randomized sampling testing protocol of the school population to inform policy on the incidence in schools.
6. The GHS must provide nurses in every secondary school.
7. The GES must provide sick bays in every secondary school.
8. The GES must ensure every school receives PPEs and sanitation logistics before reopening.
9. The GES must increase the number of veronica buckets per school to enable each class room to have its own bucket.
10. The GES must develop a COVID-19 School Management Manual to guide school heads, and train them on the manual before re-opening schools.
11. The GHS must ensure Health and Safety training for school staff precedes school re-opening.
12. The GHS must produce and display communication materials on COVID-19 protocols and compliance across campuses to help in Behaviour Change of students.
13. CSOs should work with the media to broadcast sex/moral education content targeting adolescent girls at home.
14. Teachers who serve on the School COVID-19 team should be excluded from teaching, to strengthen their focus.
15. GES must distribute PPEs to schools directly, rather than leaving them at the DEO.



## **CONCLUSION**

The decision to reopen schools was in the best interest of saving the Ghanaian Educational System from undue pandemic disruption, and the government's handling of the situation must be commended. It is important that the lessons and data gathered from reopening for finalists to prepare and write their final exams would be put into perspective to better inform decisions as preparations and consultations are being made to reopen schools for all students.

## APPENDIX

### List Of Sampled Schools

1. Nassah Junior High School
2. Our Ladies of Lourdes Girls' Senior High School (O.L.L.)
3. Bawku SHS
4. Bolgatanga Technical Institute
5. Kongo Senior High School
6. Bolgatanga Senior High School
7. Umaria Islamic JHS
8. Sombo Senior High
9. Opoku Ware Girls Academy
10. Moree Community Senior High School
11. Moree SHS
12. Okuapeman school
13. Darul Hardis JHS
14. Kpambegu Khalidiya Islamic JHS
15. Bokemei International School
16. Islamic Senior High, Tamale
17. Okomfo Anokye SHS
18. Bongo Senior High School
19. President JEA Mills Basic
20. Accra Girls' SHS
21. Akrofuom Secondary Technical High school
22. Hudson Bay Montessori Academy
23. Suame Methodist JHS
24. Grace Mercy Memorial Academy
25. Zorkor Senior High School
26. PRESEC, Legon
27. St. Andrew 4, 5,6, & 8 JHS
28. Seikwa Presby JHS
29. Ghanata Senior High School
30. Nungua Anglican 2 JHS
31. Field Engineer A JHS
32. St. Mary's SHS
33. Tenashie JHS
34. Atomfoso R/C Junior High School
35. Michel Camp 2 JHS
36. Sefwi Wiawso Senior High
37. Community 8 No.1 JHS
38. Menji Islamic JHS
39. Afiencya Basic school
40. Bethel Methodist Junior High School
41. Jirapa Girls' Model JHS
42. The Lincoln School
43. Ada Senior High Technical
44. Azeem-Namoa Senior High School
45. Ashaiman SHS
46. Edinaman SHS
47. Kuncheni R/C J H S
48. Kwabenya Community SHS
49. Wajir Barracks A JHS
50. St. John's School
51. Baidoo Bonsoe SHTS
52. St. Augustine's College

53. Kenyasi No.1 JHS
54. St. Mary's Boys'
55. Sabronum D.A B Primary
56. Dompooase SHS
57. Sekondi College
58. Sekwa Senior High School
59. Serwaa Nyarko Girls SHS
60. Njau-Tanoso R/C JHS
61. Opoku Ware School
62. Ahantaman Girls SHS
63. Bethel Methodist JHS
64. Bishop Herman College
65. Tuobodom D/A Basic School
66. Hodzo Anyiboboe M/A Basic School
67. Prempeh College
68. Ach Bishop Porters Secondary School
69. Mpatasie M/A JHS
70. Vakpo SHS
71. Duadinyediga JHS
72. Papu R/C JHS
73. Yabrago Junior High School
74. Kikam Technical Institute
75. Kpeve Tornu Salvation Army JHS
76. Bolga Technical Institute
77. Kwameta M/A Basic School
78. St. Josephs SHS
79. Nsutaman Catholic SHS
80. Gowrie Senior High Technical School
81. Baidoo Bonsoe SHTS
82. Loggu Senior High School
83. Aboadi M/A JHS
84. Agona SDA Basic School
85. Tuasa D/A JHS
86. Berekum Senior High School
87. Nkonakwaja D/A JHS
88. New Generation SHS
89. Akatim R/C Basic School
90. Catholic Basic School, Agona Nsaba
91. St. Theresa's JHS, Berekum
92. Berekum Methodist 'C' Basic School
93. St. Louis SHS
94. Berekum Presbyterian Senior High School
95. St Mary's Boys SHS
96. All for Christ Senior High Technical School
97. Kpone Methodist 'B' Basic
98. Kojo Ashong Methodist Basic
99. Tiisa R/C J.H.S
100. Sekondi College
101. Sacred Heart SHS
102. Diane Senior High School
103. Takoradi Technical Institute
104. Akpafu Todzi EP JHS
105. Golden Gare Senior High
106. Firm Foundation Academy
107. Twifo Praso Senior High School
108. Shama Senior High School

109. Debibi R/C JHS
110. St. Francis Demonstration JHS, Hohoe
111. St. Peter's Mission School
112. Saints Peter and Paul RC JHS Anfoega
113. Guakro Effah SHS
114. Tuobodom Senior High School
115. Paradise Children Academy
116. Ideal College
117. Menji Islamic JHS
118. Nsawkaw R/C JHS
119. Debibi Roman Catholic Primary
120. St. Joseph's College of Education
121. Nav-West Basic
122. Bekwai SDA SHS
123. Babile M/A JHS
124. Have Ando No.2 Basic School
125. Bishop Catholic JHS, Wa
126. Ghana Secondary Technical School
127. Peki Senior High Technical School
128. Wogu R/C JHS
129. Akpafu Todzi JHS
130. Old Brosankro D/A JHS
131. Dunkwa-Achiase DA Basic School
132. Bechem Presbyterian Senior High
133. St. Augustine's SHTS
134. Matse E.P JHS
135. Myohaung Barracks Basic School
136. Keta Business College
137. Christ The King SHS, Obuasi
138. Rev. Grant JHS
139. AME Zion SHS
140. Bethel Methodist JHS
141. RC JHS, Dzemeni
142. Nkran/Ngresi D/A Basic 'B'
143. Abee AME Zion JHS
144. Mfantipim SHS
145. Nyive M/A Primary
146. Samuel Otu Presbyterian SHS, Techimantia
147. Bechem SDA JHS
148. Derma Community Day Senior High
149. Ghana Muslim Mission SHS, Beposo
150. Konadu Yiadom SHS
151. Darmang Catholic JHS
152. Asokore DA Trinity JHS
153. St. Jerome SHS
154. St. Thomas Aquinas Senior High School
155. Mpasatia D/A JHS
156. Abura Gyabankrom D/A Methodist Primary School
157. Atonsu Future Leaders International School
158. Tamale SHS
159. Ahenema Kokoben D/A 2 JHS
160. FR. Krische R/C JHS, Old Tafo
161. Nyankumasi Ahenkro SHS
162. Asanteman Girls Secondary School
163. Elmina M.A JHS
164. Presbyterian Senior High Technical School Arabia Coaltar

165. Biakpa D.A JHS
166. Kwasi Opong SHS
167. Accra High School
168. University Practice SHS
169. Kyinaso D/A Basic School
170. Ahenkro D/A Experimental JHS
171. Tongor SHTS
172. Liati Agbonyra R.C Basic School
173. Xorsekofe D/A Basic school
174. Caci Bethel Preparatory/JHS
175. Piina SHS
176. Takpo SHS
177. Daffiamah SHS
178. Notre Dame Seminary/ SHS
179. Kpeve Senior High School
180. Boso SHS
181. Have D/A JHS
182. Buema SHS
183. St. Joseph Boys JHS
184. Worawora SHS
185. Yilo Krobo SHT
186. Sonrise SHS
187. Navorongo Demonstration JHS
188. Abutia SHS
189. Adenta Community Day SHS
190. Kedjebi Asantu SHS
191. Kabore JHS
192. Wesley Girls SHS
193. Kwabenya Cluster of Schools
194. Have Technical Institute
195. Frankadua RC JHS
196. Abetifi Demonstration JHS
197. Aburi Girls SHS
198. St. Mary's SHS
199. Philip Akpo RC JHS
200. Holy Rosary JHS

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